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Date: Fri, 17 Jun 2011 21:22:34 -0400

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Conversation: Pervez Musharraf Speaks to CNN - "Pakistan: A reality check amid the terror and chaos"

Subject: Pervez Musharraf Speaks to CNN - "Pakistan: A reality check amid the terror and chaos"

Pakistan: A reality check amid the terror and chaos

By **Pervez Musharraf**, Special to CNN

June 9, 2011 6:17 a.m. EDT

Editor's note: Former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf came to power in a bloodless military coup in 1999 when he was chief of Pakistan's army. He held power until the 2008 elections after which he resigned; since then he has lived in self-imposed exile in London. In late 2010 he launched the All Pakistan Muslim League party with a view to running for office in 2013.



(CNN) -- Today Pakistan finds itself in the eye of the terrorism storm. An environment of controversies, contradictions, distortions and mutual suspicions prevails all around, polluting and weakening the war on terror. The situation demands a clearer understanding of ground realities in south Asia, bridging the acute trust deficit and developing a unity of thought and action among all coalition players. Blame games, rigidity, arrogance and insensitivity to others' interests will always remain counterproductive.

I would like to start by analyzing the existing environment in its historical perspective. How did religious militancy get introduced into Pakistan? There is no doubt that Pakistan is a victim of terrorism and is certainly not the perpetrator.

In 1979, the United States, in its own interest of containing Soviet expansion, and Pakistan, in its own national interest of preserving its integrity against the Soviet design of reaching the warm waters of the Indian Ocean through Pakistan, initiated a jihad (holy war in defense of Islam) in Afghanistan. We inducted 25,000 to 30,000 Mujahedeen (holy warriors) from all over the Muslim world into Afghanistan and also pumped in Taliban from the tribal agencies of Pakistan after arming and training them.

Musharraf launches new political party.

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In effect, therefore, for 10 long years from 1979 to 1989, we gave birth to religious militancy under the call for jihad. The freedom struggle in Indian-held Kashmir started in 1989 and continues till now. It has tremendous public sympathy in Pakistan and has given birth to several Mujahedeen groups. This is another big cause of religious militancy in Pakistan.

Then there was the most disastrous period of 1989-2001 for Afghanistan when the United States summarily quit the area, resulting in the coalescing of the Mujahedeen into al Qaeda and the rise of the Taliban. During this period, four million Afghan refugees came into Pakistan.

Finally, to crown it all, there was 9/11, initiating the U.S. military offensive in Afghanistan and Pakistan's membership of the coalition. In its aftermath, all hell broke loose in Pakistan, with religious militancy from the east and the west. Pakistan's national and social fabric was torn asunder.

Why is there so much antipathy in Pakistan's public mind against the United States? This is despite the fact that Pakistan was very consciously in strategic alliance with the United States and the West for 42 years since our independence in 1947 and together fought a jihad in Afghanistan for 10 years from 1979 to 1989. Our relationship, and even public perceptions of each other, were pretty normal and friendly until 1989.

The abandonment of Pakistan after 1989, with a strategic shift of U.S. policy towards India and military sanctions against Pakistan, cost U.S.-Pakistan relations very dearly. In Pakistan's public mind, the United States "used" Pakistan and then abandoned it: this was taken as a betrayal. The U.S. nuclear policy of appeasement and strategic co-operation with India against Pakistan is taken by the man in the street in Pakistan as very partisan and an act of animosity against our national interest. The continuing U.S. military presence and operations in Afghanistan, the indiscriminate drone attacks with increasing collateral damage in the tribal agencies of Pakistan and, finally, the violation of Pakistani sovereignty in the cross-border strike against Osama bin Laden are all now seen most negatively by the people of Pakistan.

To further complicate and indeed weaken our joint war against terror, there is an acute deficit of trust and confidence between the United States and Pakistan at all levels of government, the military and intelligence. This has increased manifold over the last year. It started somewhat with myself in 2004-2005. Our policy in Pakistan's tribal agencies was to wean away Pakthuns from the Taliban. I coined a phrase back in 2002-2003 that all Taliban are Pakthun, but all Pakthun are not Taliban. The methodology adopted was through the convening of Jirgas (gatherings of notables and elders), which are very much a tribal custom. This was seen in certain quarters in the United States and also the media as "double dealing." There were accusations against me that I was "dealing" with the Taliban.

My many exhortations that this was a baseless accusation -- and the logic of how I could be dealing with people who were trying to assassinate me -- fell on deaf ears. Problems also arose whenever the United States showed tendencies towards micro management. My argument always was to co-operate and believe in strategic coordination to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban and to leave the tactics and micro management to us. The bone of contention now seems to be the general feeling in U.S. circles that Pakistan refused to take military action in North Waziristan against the Siraj Haqqani group of Taliban. American accusations about Pakistan's military and intelligence services being complicit with the Taliban basically result from this.

I am not privy to Pakistan's strategy of not operating against the Haqqani, at least for the time being. However, I am very sure that they cannot be supporting them. The malicious role of India and the Afghan government itself in maligning Pakistan's military and intelligence must not be overlooked. We know what Indian consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad especially are doing. We also know that Afghan intelligence, military and foreign service personnel go for training in India. Not a single one comes to Pakistan, despite Pakistan's longstanding offer of free training since my time in office.

The locating and killing of Osama bin Laden in the most unlikely hideout of Abbottabad has shocked the world -- most of all Pakistan. It indeed strengthens the argument about Pakistan's complicity with the Taliban. The question being debated is whether this is complicity or incompetence. I would certainly go for the latter: incompetence and callousness of the highest degree.

The simple logic that I would apply, whether anyone believes it or not, is that if bin Laden was hiding in Abbottabad for five years (which my sense of logic does not readily accept), then any complicity involves me also. I knew nothing about it, and I cannot imagine in my wildest dreams that the intelligence agencies were hiding it from me. Therefore, there was no complicity at the top.

Could rogue elements within the intelligence services have been harboring him? Not possible. The intelligence detachment personnel in the area, or at least the commander, must have changed at least three times in this period. Could all of them have been aiding and abetting him? No. Does not knowing bin Laden's whereabouts, for however long, stand the test of reason? I think it does. After all the thousands of people living around Osama's house also did not know. Human intelligence, after all, gathers information from people.

Let me finally come to the way ahead. Does the present environment bode well for the global war on terror? Certainly not. Therefore, the earlier we mend fences, the better for Pakistan, the United States, the south Asia region and indeed the whole world.

The first and most urgent need of the hour is to restore trust. We must speak the truth with each other very openly and frankly. Pakistan needs to explain clearly why it is not acting against the Haqqani group or when it will operate in North Waziristan. The intelligence agencies of Pakistan should be purged of any elements who may not be committed to the official line of fighting al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The United States, on the other hand, must trust that Pakistan is committed to fighting terrorism and that it is doing this in its own interest. Attacking targets in tribal agencies must be left to Pakistani forces, even if it means giving drones to Pakistan. Our sovereignty must be respected. Pakistan's army looks overstretched and maybe somewhat fatigued. There is a need to raise about 20 more wings of Frontier Corps and equip them with more tanks and medium guns. Abandoning the area by U.S. and other Coalition forces without creating the appropriate political environment and the military capability in the Afghan forces would be most inadvisable.

The ulterior Indian motive of creating an anti-Pakistan Afghanistan has to stop. Afghan President Hamid Karzai must also understand this and stop stabbing Pakistan in the back. Only the United States can ensure such an essential change. The Kashmir dispute needs an urgent, amicable settlement. That is the core towards stopping the religious militancy of the Kashmir-orientated Mujahedeen.

In the final analysis Pakistan also has to look inwards to resolve its sociopolitical conflict. We, as a nation, have to boldly demonstrate our resolve towards moderation and rejection of extremism from within our society. We have to follow, with courage, the five-point agenda that I created to check extremism within:

1. Stop misuse of madrassas and mosques from preaching militancy of any form.
2. Stop printing/publishing and selling/distributing any material spreading violence and militancy.
3. Ban militant religious organizations and deny their reemergence under different names.
4. Keep the religious syllabus and curriculum in schools under constant review to prevent any teaching of controversial issues, which could lead to religious rigidity, extremism and intolerance.
5. Implement a madrassa strategy to mainstream Taliban into the social fabric of the nation.

All this is easier said than done. It needs a government that comprehends the magnitude of the task, has the following of the people and the determination to change. In the present political scenario none of the political parties or their leaders has the acumen to achieve such lofty ideals. We face an acute leadership vacuum. This has to be filled. We have to break the political status quo. We have to produce a political alternative to be seen domestically and

internationally as viable and take it to victory through democratic means.

Time is of essence for Pakistan. Too much water has flown under the bridge. The next elections will be the mother of all elections.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Pervez Musharraf.

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